

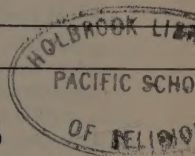
E CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS LETTER

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Forefathers' Sunday, November 20, 1955

REV. R. WILBUR SIMMONS, *Pioneer Church, Sacramento, Calif.*

"Be it Resolved That we commend to all the churches, associations, conferences and mission boards that the Sunday preceding Thanksgiving be observed as Forefathers' Day with appropriate services."

Vote by The General Council — June 30, 1954

IN response to the vote of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, many churches throughout the land are joining with other churches of our denomination in this day of remembrance for those heroic men and women who, about 350 years ago, at great sacrifice, with much suffering, and with risk of their lives, prepared the way for us, and laid down the guiding principles of freedom in Congregational Church government and policy, and inspired the same principles in our national government.

That Congregationalism had a profound influence in shaping the American Constitution has been long recognized. Daniel Webster called the Mayflower Compact "the seed corn of the Constitution." Congregational Churches, as a denomination, made no attempt to influence by political action the shaping of the Constitution. However, the "seed" had been sown and it fell on good ground. New England patriots took a leading place in preparing for the Revolutionary War and seeing it through to victory and in the formation of a government of free people and in its maintenance.

The influence of Congregationalism began with the Mayflower Compact, and received a tremendous impulse on May 1, 1639, when Thomas Hooker, in a sermon in Hartford, Connecticut, declared the principle that all authority rests upon the free consent of the people.

Under the influence of that sermon, "The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut" were adopted, and this action and this concept were forerunners of the American Constitution and many of the principles of the orders are established in our national Constitution and in the constitutions of our various states.

The American Thanksgiving and the heritage of the Forefathers belong in a very special way to the Congregational Church. It was the Pilgrims at Plymouth who first set apart the day for Thanksgiving to Almighty God. We do well to honor the early leaders and to pledge ourselves to support the foundation ideals of Americanism. The lives and works of our Forefathers are an integral portion of the American Heritage for which the people of the whole land should give hearty thanks. Let us all honor their memory "with appropriate services."

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what deeds thou didst perform in their days, in the days of old . . . for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but thy right hand, and thy arm, and the light of thy countenance; for thou didst delight in them. Psalm 44: 1, 3.

THE BODY OF LIBERTIES

In December 1641, the Massachusetts Colony adopted *The Body of Liberties* — the code of laws to govern their affairs. *The Body of Liberties* also contained many of the seeds of the civil liberties which today distinguish us from the totalitarian systems:

- equal justice under law for citizens and foreigners
- no punishment except by an express law
- compensation for private property taken for public use
- freedom of speech and publication at any town meeting
- freedom to leave the colony at any time
- right to bail and to a speedy criminal trial
- right to jury trial
- protection against being twice sentenced for the same offense
- prohibition of use of torture and the hated inquisitorial oath to make an accused or any other person testify to things that might incriminate him
- right of the people to elect those who will govern them
- prohibition of slavery and of inhumane, barbarous, and cruel punishment
- free (as distinguished from feudal) land ownership.

Separation of church and state, and tolerance for diverse religious views, were yet to come. Moreover, *The Body of Liberties* provided that once a defendant had been convicted, he could be tortured in order to get evidence that might incriminate others. Yet *The Body of Liberties*, in its main emphasis, was a new *Magna Carta*. Justice William O. Douglas, *An Almanac of Liberty*, p. 190. (By permission.)

BOOKS WANTED

WANTED by Warren H. Denison, 632 Broad St., Grinnell, Iowa, Chairman, Christian Church Sub-Committee:

- “History of the Christian Denomination in America” — Morrill.
- “The Christian Annual of 1898.”
- “Memoirs of Deceased Christian Ministers” — Humphreys.
- “The Christian and the Great Commission” — Bishop.
- “The Age of Inquiry” — Elias Smith.
- “Biography of Elder David Purviance” — Purviance.

FURTHER WORD ON THE MAYFLOWER PILGRIMAGE

The keel of the second Mayflower was laid by the officials of the “Mayflower Project” at Brixham, England. Commander D. K. Winslow, R.N. (Ret.), who is a descendant of Gov. Winslow of Plymouth, Mass., officiating. Pub-

lic officials participated and music was furnished by the choir of All Saints Church, and the blessing “was sought of the God the Pilgrim Fathers sailed to serve in freedom.”

The new Mayflower will sail next year on the anniversary of the Pilgrims’ sailing. The ship will be built on the plan of the original Mayflower and will carry the same number in crew and an equal number of passengers. It is expected the voyage will take about as long as did the first and will reach Plymouth, Mass. in December 1956. The purpose of the good will “Mayflower Project” was organized to foster with their ship Anglo-American friendship in defense of peace and liberty that the men of the first Mayflower sailed to seek. The project has been blessed by the U. S. Ambassador to England, and preparations are being made in New England to give the ship a royal welcome. The office in London has had more than 3000 applications from would-be passengers, of which only 50 will be accepted. The crew will be composed of 21 volunteer yachtsmen.

COMPACT DAY

Compact Day, November 21, is celebrated in many sections of our country, as the document was signed in the cabin of the Mayflower that day in 1620. This was the first charter of government of the people, by the people, and for the people, known to history. As the Historian George Bancroft has written:

“Here was the birth of popular constitutional liberty — In the cabin of the Mayflower, Humanity recovered its rights, and instituted government on the basis of equal laws enacted by all the people for the general good.”

And Daniel Webster:

“Here a government and a country were to commence, with the very first foundations laid under the Divine Light of the Christian religion.”

And Rufus Choate:

“Freedom hovered over the rock-bound coast of New England and set the Stars and Glory there.”

Mr. Harry B. Sherman, Box 936, Providence, R. I., is Secretary of the Society that prepares splendid material for use in churches and schools. More than five million pieces are published each year and are used in hundreds of public schools. A supply will be sent to pastors free on request.

Forefathers’ Day, Compact Day, and Thanksgiving Day form a trinity, all concerned with preserving our national heritage, and should be included in our thoughtful remembrance and our giving of sincere thanks to God for His guidance and continued concern for the children of men.

FROM THE WORDS OF THE FATHERS

The first pastors of the first seven Congregational Churches gathered in America
Selected by REV. VERNE D. MOREY, PH.D.

JOHN ROBINSON, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1620-1625

(An Early Characterization of Early Congregationalism)

The wholesome counsel Master Robinson gave that part of the church whereof he was pastor at their departure from him to begin the great work of plantation in New England: We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knoweth whether ever he should live to see our faces again. But whether the Lord appointed or not, he charged us, before God and his blessed angels, to follow him no further than he allowed Christ; and if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of his, to be as ready to receive it, as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry. For he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word.

—Reported by Edward Winslow.

FRANCIS HIGGINSON, First Pastor of the Church at Salem, Mass., 1629-1630

(The Non-Separatist Congregational Principle)

We will not say as the Separatists were wont to say at their leaving of England, "Farewell England, Farewell, Rome"; but we will say, Farewell dear England, Farewell the Church of God in England, and all the Christian friends here!" We do not go to New England as separatists from the Church of England, though we cannot but separate from the corruptions in it, but we go to practice the positive part of church reformation, and propagate the gospel in America.

JOHN WARHAM, First Pastor of the Church at Dorchester, Mass., 1630-1636, and First Pastor of the Church at Windsor, Conn., 1636-1670

(The Importance of the Minister to the Civil Power)

I suppose the first preacher to ever preach the notes in our New England was the Rev. John Warham: who though he were sometimes faulted for it . . . was a more vigorous preacher than the most of them. His latter days were spent in the pastoral care and charge of the church at Windsor, where the whole Colony of Connecticut considered him as a principal father and father of the Colony.

—Testimony of Cotton Mather.

JOHN WILSON, First Pastor of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1667

(An Early Covenant, Written by John Wilson, and Still in Use in This Church)

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to his holy will and divine ordi-

nance. We whose names are hereunder written, being by his most wise and good providence brought together into this part of America in the Bay of Massachusetts, and desirous to unite ourselves into one Congregation, or Church, under the Lord Jesus Christ our Head, in such sort as becometh all those whom he hath redeemed and sanctified to himself, do hereby solemnly, and religiously (as in his most holy presence) promise, and bind ourselves, to walk in all our ways according to the rule of the gospel, and in all sincere conformity to his holy ordinances, and in mutual love, and respect each to other, so near as God shall give us grace.

—The Church Covenant.

5. GEORGE PHILLIPS, First Pastor of the Church in Watertown, Mass., 1630-1644

(A Congregational Definition of a Church)

A Church becomes a Church . . . by God's dispensations, and that performed by these two acts: First, on God's part, sending the word of his grace, offering it unto a people, thereby opening their eyes and turning them from darkness to light. Secondly, . . . such peoples take hold of God's offer, and taking him and his Christ to be theirs . . . yield themselves up together in joint public visible profession.

6. THOMAS WELDE, First Pastor of the Church in Roxbury, Mass., 1632-1641

(The Early Practice of the Churches)

Our practice in Discipline consists in these six heads especially: 1. In gathering or founding our churches. 2. In calling officers: as Pastors, Teachers, Ruling Elders, Deacons. 3. In solemn Church worship. 4. In admitting of members. 5. In recommendations and dismissions of members to other Churches. 6. In censuring delinquent members.

7. THOMAS HOOKER, First Pastor of the Church at Newtown (Cambridge), Mass.,

1633-1636, and First Pastor of the Church at Hartford, Conn., 1636-1663

(The Depth of Tolerance)

He that will estrange his affection, because of the difference of apprehension in things difficult, he must be a stranger to himself one time or other. If men would be tender and careful to keep off offensive expressions, they might keep some distance in opinion, in some things, without hazard to truth or love. But whenever men set up their sheaves (though it be but in a dream as Joseph's was) and fall out with every one, that will not fall down and adore them, they will bring much trouble into the world, but little advantage to the truth, or peace.

ELDER BREWSTER'S SPEECH

(As spoken by Daniel Webster at the Pilgrim Festival, New York, 1850.)

Are ye our children? Is this magnificent City but an off-shoot from Plymouth Rock? Is this one part of the Great Reward for which my Brethren endured lives of toil and of hardship? We had Faith and Hope. God granted us the spirit to look forward; and we did look forward. Our thoughts, our hopes, were on another life. Of earthly gratifications we tasted little; for human honors we had little expectation. Yet forevermore, ours is the glory, under God, of bringing forth Human Freedom into this world. Our bones lie on that hillside in Plymouth Churchyard, obscure, unmarked, secreted, to preserve our graves from the knowledge of savage foes. No stone tells where we lie. And yet, you who are our descendants, who enjoy prosperity and the thousand blessings showered upon you by the God of your Fathers: We envy you not. Be prosperous, be enlightened, if such be your allotment on earth; but live, also, always to God and to Duty. Accomplish the whole of your great destiny,

and if it be that through the whole you cherish an undying love for civil and religious liberty, and mean to enjoy them yourselves, and are willing to shed your heart's blood to transmit them to posterity, then will you be worthy descendants of Bradford, of Standish, of Winslow, and the rest of those who landed from stormy seas on the rock of Plymouth.

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND HYMNS FOR FOREFATHERS' DAY

Abram's Pilgrimage — Genesis 12: 1-8

Moses' Pilgrimage — Exodus 14: 26-31, and

15: 1-18

"The Faith of the fathers of old times"

Hebrews 11: 1—12: 2.

SUITABLE HYMNS

O God, Beneath Thy Guiding Hand
Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still
Our Fathers' God, from Out Whose Hand
O Beautiful for Spacious Skies
My Country, 'Tis of Thee
God of Our Fathers, Known of Old

FOREFATHERS' DAY PRAYER

O God, before whose face the generations rise and pass away: age after age the living seek thee, and find that of thy faithfulness there is no end. Our fathers, in their pilgrimage, walked by thy guidance, and rested on thy compassion. Still to us, their children, be thou the cloud by day, the fire by night; where but in thee have we a covert from the storm or shadow from the heat of life? In our manifold temptations, thou alone knowest and are ever nigh. In sorrow thy comfort renews our life. In prosperity and ease, it is thy spirit only that can wean us from pride and selfishness. O Thou sole source of peace and righteousness, take now the veil from every heart, and join us in one communion with thy prophets and saints, who have trusted in thee and have been left desolate. Not of our witness, but by thy tender mercy, hear our prayer; in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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